

Geographic Review Panel 3 – American River/Eastside Tribes

Proposal number: 2001-C206

Short Proposal Title: Murphy Creek Watershed

1. Applicability to CALFED ERP Goals and Implementation Plan and CVPIA priorities, and relevance to ERP and CVPIA priorities for your region. The primary hypothesis proposed for testing by the proposed plan is that natural channel dynamics and historic salmonid spawning area can be recovered through removal of dams, development of off stream water sources and conservation easements. Although the scientific and technical review teams thought otherwise, successfully implemented, this project is applicable to both CALFED and CVPIA goals for this region. Specifically, CALFED goals 1, 2 and 3 (at risk species, ecosystem processes and biotic communities, and harvestable species respectively). Additionally, this project is the first phase of an implementation project that is directly applicable to CALFED uncertainty 12 (beyond the riparian corridor/agricultural conservation and wildlife friendly farming practices).

2. Linkages/coordination with previously funded projects or other restoration activities in your region. The proposed work will contribute to the overall goals of the CALFED-funded lower Mokelumne River Watershed Stewardship Plan, as well as to river restoration and management projects funded primarily by EBMUD.

3. Feasibility, especially the project's ability to move forward in a timely and successful manner. Yes. Dam removal, reduction in grazing pressure, and re-vegetation along stream corridors are proven methods of restoring riparian and riverine habitat. Further, the project timeline to develop the watershed plan seems appropriate given the cooperative relationship that already exists between the various private and public project participants.

4. Qualifications of the applicants and others involved in implementing the proposed project. The project proponents appear generally qualified, but would benefit from the input of a geomorphologist and riparian ecologist.

5. Local involvement (including environmental compliance). Local landowners and EBMUD involved and supportive.

6. Cost. For the following reasons the budget seems excessive:

- There appears to be some potential that Task 1 will not be successful (development of easements and landowner agreement to remove the reservoirs), yet restoration plans and off-site water supply designs that may never see implementation are to be developed synchronously.
- Task 3 is to assess land values, and is estimated to cost \$100,000.

The level of landowner commitment to the conservation easements and stream restoration should be clarified, and the cost of task 3 should be justified in detail.

7. Cost sharing. Yes, comprised of small contributions from EBMUD and the Woodbridge River Company.

8. Additional comments. A great weakness of this proposal is that it's at least 50% a planning and easement evaluation, about which the level of commitment made by the

landowners to the easements and restoration is unclear. For example: the summary budget states that task 1 is to “*meet with the landowners to **define potential** for easements and restoration,*” indicating the possibility that these elements may never be realized. If this is a possibility, then it begs the question of whether the value of the synchronously developed design level restoration plans ever be realized.

Additionally, while the proposed restoration work has great merit, the proposal tends to focus on secondary benefits versus primary benefits, and then only tangentially addresses these. For example, the primary benefits might be stated as the following hypotheses:

- Removal of dams from the Murphy Creek watershed will re-establish natural physical processes that provide the energy and material necessary to recreate and maintain healthy and diverse riverine habitats that support native populations of plants, fish and wildlife.
- Removal of dams from the Murphy Creek watershed will re-establish natural sediment transport that will benefit the creek, and may make significant contributions to the nutrient and gravel deficit of the Mokelumne River.
- Removal of dams from the Murphy Creek will re-establish passage to fall run chinook salmon and re-open nearly 11 miles of currently inaccessible potential spawning habitat
- Upland habitat values on existing farmland will be protected by the purchase of conservation easements that promote wildlife-friendly farming.

Regional Ranking

Panel Ranking: Medium high

Provide a brief explanation of your ranking: The basic concept has genuine merit, but is weakened by the lack of clarity surrounding landowner commitment to the proposed conservation easements and stream restoration.

Recommend that the proposal be fully funded contingent upon the following:

- resolution of the question about the level of landowner commitment to the easement and restoration program,
- justification of the costs associated with assessment of land values, and
- the addition of a geomorphologist and riparian ecologist either to the project design team or in a peer review capacity.

Otherwise, recommend that the project proponent be **HIGHLY ENCOURAGED** to address the deficiencies noted, and that the proposal be resubmitted for consideration in the next funding cycle.